

Basic Chinese Grammar - Index

| | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Personal pronouns | Nominal measure words |
| 们 (men) plurals | Verbal measure words |
| Questions | Complements |
| Adjectives / 很 | 的 |
| 是 and 有 | 地 |
| Adverbs | 得 |
| Preposition (location) | 来 |
| Negation | 给 |
| Conjunctions | Time/Duration |
| Aspect | Location/Direction |
| Attitude | Passive |
| Modals | 把 construction |
| 一下 | 是.....的 construction |

Chinese Grammar - Personal pronouns

The most common personal pronouns in Chinese are:

| | | | | | |
|---|-----|--------------------------------|---|----|-------------------|
| 我 | wǒ | I | 他 | tā | he |
| 你 | nǐ | you (informal) | 她 | tā | she |
| 您 | nín | you (formal) ^{[1][4]} | 它 | tā | it ^[2] |

| | | | | | |
|----|--------|-------------------|----|-------|------|
| 我们 | wǒmen | we | 他们 | tāmen | they |
| 咱们 | zánmen | we ^[3] | 她们 | tāmen | they |
| 你们 | nǐmen | you | 它们 | tāmen | they |

Notes:

- [1] 您 is used to show respect explicitly (to superiors, customers, older people). Where there is no need to emphasise respect 你 is used instead.
- [2] 它 and 它们 are used much less than 'it' or 'they' in English. Where the reference is obvious 它/它们 is usually omitted.
- [3] 咱们 is used by the speaker to explicitly include the listener as a member of 'we'. It can always be replaced with the more neutral 我们.
- [4] There is no plural form for 您. Instead a measure word and numeral is used:

| | | | | | |
|-----|------------|----------------|------|------------|-------------------|
| 您二位 | nín èr wèi | the two of you | 您几位? | nín jǐ wèi | how many are you? |
|-----|------------|----------------|------|------------|-------------------|

Chinese Grammar - Personal pronouns

Examples:

| | | |
|---------------|---|--|
| 我是学生。 | wǒ shì xuésheng | I am a student. |
| 你也是学生吗? | nǐ yě shì xuésheng ma | Are you also a student? |
| 他是老师。 | tā shì lǎoshī | He is a teacher. |
| 她是教授。 | tā shì jiàoshòu | She is a professor. |
| 我们是中国入。 | wǒmen shì zhōngguórén | We are Chinese. (including or excluding the listener) |
| 咱们走吧! | zánmen zǒu ba! | Let's go! (including the listener) |
| 你们是英国人吗? | nǐmen shì yīngguórén | Are you English? |
| 他们是美国人。 | tāmen shì měiguórén | They are Americans. |
| 她们是歌手。 | tāmen shì gēshǒu | They (group of women) are singers. |
| 这是她的花朵。它们很漂亮。 | zhè shì tā de huāduǒ. tāmen hěn piàoliang | These are her flowers. They are beautiful. (它们 would usually be omitted.) |

Chinese Grammar - 们 (men) plurals

们 is a plural suffix. It is only used with nouns or pronouns that refer to people. It cannot be used in noun phrases that contain a numeral or a quantifier.

| | | |
|-----------|------------------------|----------------------|
| 我 -> 我们 | wǒmen | we |
| 老师 -> 老师们 | lǎoshīmen | teachers |
| 女士们, 先生们 | nǚshìmen, xiānshēngmen | Ladies and gentlemen |

You cannot say:

| | | |
|---------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| *我的班有二十五个学生们。 | wǒ de bān yǒu èrshíwǔ gè xuéshengmen. | My class has twenty-five pupils. |
|---------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|

Instead say:

| | | |
|-------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 我的班有二十五个学生。 | wǒ de bān yǒu èrshíwǔ gè xuésheng. | My class has twenty-five pupils. |
|-------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|

Chinese Grammar - Questions

Use the following interrogative pronouns ask questions:

| | | |
|-----------|----------|--|
| who? | 谁 | shéi |
| when? | 什么时候 | shénme shíhòu |
| what? | 什么 | shénme |
| why? | 为什么 | wèishénme |
| where? | 哪里, 哪儿 | nǎlǐ, nǎr |
| how? | 怎么样 | zěnmeyàng |
| how many? | 几, 多少 | jǐ [for up to ten], duōshǎo [ten and more] |
| how long? | 多少时间, 多久 | duōshǎo shíjiān, duōjiǔ |

Chinese Grammar - Questions

Note that the interrogative pronoun appears in place of that part of the sentence, that the pronoun asks about.
Examples:

| | | |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 谁住在北京? | shéi zhù zài běijīng | Who lives in Beijing? |
| 他什么时候来北京? | tā shénme shíhòu lái běijīng | When will he come to Beijing? |
| 他干什么? | tā gān shénme | What does he do? |
| 他为什么坐飞机? | tā wèishénme zuò fēijī | Why is he taking the plane? |
| 他住在哪里? | tā zhù zài nǎlǐ | Where does he live? |
| 他学中文学得怎么样? | tā xué zhōngwén xué de zěnmeyàng | How does he learn Chinese? |
| 他有几个兄弟? | tā yǒu jǐ gè xiōngdì | How many brothers does he have? |
| 他有多少钱? | tā yǒu duōshǎo qián | How much money does he have? |
| 他住在北京多长时间了? | tā zhù zài běijīng duōshǎo shíjiān le | How long did he live in Beijing? |

Chinese Grammar - Questions

To ask if something is the case add 吗 (ma) to a statement:

| | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 他是老师。 -> 他是老师吗? | tā shì lǎoshī. -> tā shì lǎoshī ma? | He is a teacher. Is he a teacher? |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|

or use an affirmative / negative structure:

| | | |
|------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| 他是老师。 -> 他是不是老师? | tā shì lǎoshī. -> tā shì bú shì lǎoshī ma? | He is a teacher. Is he a teacher? |
|------------------|--|-----------------------------------|

You can also form a follow-up question with 呢 (ne):

| | | |
|-----------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 我是学生, 你呢? | wǒ shì xuésheng, nǐ ne? | I am a student, and you? |
|-----------|-------------------------|--------------------------|

Chinese Grammar - Adjectives, 很 and 的

Common single syllable adjectives in Chinese are:

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----|-------|---|------|-------|---|-----|------|---|-----|-----|---|------|------|
| 大 | dà | large | 小 | xiǎo | small | 好 | hǎo | good | 老 | lǎo | old | 快 | kuài | fast |
|---|----|-------|---|------|-------|---|-----|------|---|-----|-----|---|------|------|

Common single syllable adjectives in Chinese are:

| | | | | | | | | |
|----|---------|-------|----|----------|--------|----|------|---------|
| 干净 | gānjìng | clean | 聪明 | cōngmíng | clever | 糊涂 | hútu | confuse |
|----|---------|-------|----|----------|--------|----|------|---------|

Common single syllable adjectives in Chinese are:

| | | | | |
|------------------|-------------------|-----------|------------|-------------------|
| 一座大房子 | 一个小孩子 | 好主意 | 老人 | 一辆快车 |
| yī zuò dà fángzi | yī gè xiǎo hái zi | hǎo zhǔyì | lǎo rén | yī liàng kuài chē |
| a large house | a small child | good idea | old people | a fast car |

Multiple syllable adjectives are linked to the noun with 的:

| | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 一个聪明的姑娘 | 一篇糊涂的文章 | 一间干净的厨房 |
| yī gè cōngmíng de gūniang | yī piān hútu de wénzhāng | yī jiān gānjìng de chúfáng |
| a clever girl | a confused essay | a clean kitchen |

Chinese Grammar - Adjectives, 很 and 的

If the adjective is used predicatively there is no need to use 是 (shì). For this reason some grammars use the term **stative verb** instead of adjective. With single syllable adjectives:

| | | | | | |
|-----|------------|--------------------|----|--------|-------------------|
| 孩子小 | hǎizi xiǎo | the child is small | 书大 | shū dà | the book is large |
|-----|------------|--------------------|----|--------|-------------------|

with multiple syllable adjectives 很 hě, very is used:

| | | | | | |
|--------|----------------------|------------------------|--------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 房子很宽敞。 | fángzi hěn kuānchǎng | The house is spacious. | 老师很聪明。 | lǎoshī hěn cōngmíng | The teacher is clever. |
|--------|----------------------|------------------------|--------|---------------------|------------------------|

NB: 很 in this context loses its meaning 'very' unless it is especially emphasised.

Chinese Grammar - 是 and 有

是 'to be' is used to link a subject and object.

| | | |
|---------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 他是我的老师。 | tā shì wǒde lǎoshī | He is my teacher. |
|---------|--------------------|-------------------|

Note: In Chinese, adjectives (sometimes called stative verbs) do not need the word '是'.

| | | | |
|-------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------|
| 她很聪明。 | tā hěn cōngmíng | She is very clever. | Not: 她是很聪明。 |
|-------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------|

有 'to have' is used to express ownership or existence.

| | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| 她有一个弟弟。 | tā yǒu yī gè dìdì | She has a younger brother. |
| ^[1] 这里没有超市。 | zhèlǐ méi yǒu chāoshì | There is no supermarket here. |

and there are some fixed expression with 有:

| | | |
|-----|---------|-------------|
| 有意思 | yǒuyìsi | interesting |
| 有钱 | yǒuqián | rich |

^[1] 有 is always negated with 没 (méi) - 没有 (méiyǒu) to not have

Chinese Grammar - Adverbs

Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives or other adverbs. They appear in front of the word they modify.

Common adverbs are:

| Adverbs of time | | | Adverbs of quantity | | |
|-------------------|----------|----------------------------|----------------------|------|--------------------------------|
| 才 | cái | only now | 都 | dōu | all |
| 常 | cháng | often | 只 | zhǐ | only |
| 刚 | gāng | just now | 总 | zǒng | altogether |
| 已经 | yǐjīng | already | 全 | quán | total |
| 马上 | mǎshàng | immediately | 也 | yě | also |
| 就 | jiù | immediately, only, exactly | Adverbs of frequency | | |
| Adverbs of degree | | | 又 | yòu | again (relates to past events) |
| 很 | hěn | very | 再 | zài | again |
| 更 | gèng | more | Adverbs of negation | | |
| 最 | zuì | most | 不 | bù | not |
| 太 | tài | too, very | 没 | méi | not (have) |
| 非常 | fēicháng | extraordinary | 别 | bié | (must) not |

Chinese Grammar - Prepositions(locations)

Prepositions (Time, Location and Direction)

Common single syllable adjectives in Chinese are:

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|------|---------|----|--------|---------|---|------|--------------|
| 在 | zài | in, at | 自从 | zìcóng | since | 从 | cóng | from |
| 到 | dào | to | 向 | xiàng | towards | 沿 | yán | along |
| 朝 | cháo | towards | 往 | wǎng | towards | 离 | lí | distant from |

Examples:

| | | |
|--------------|--|---|
| 他在中国学习。 | tā zài zhōngguó xuéxí | He is studying in China. |
| 他从英国回去了。 | tā cóng yīngguó huí qù le | He returned home from England. |
| 他从香港到北京去旅行了。 | tā cóng xiānggǎng dào běijīng qù lǚxíng le | He travelled from Hong Kong to Beijing. |
| 自从毕业他就在美国工作。 | zìcóng bìyè tā jiù zài měiguó gōngzuò | Since he graduated he has been working in the States. |
| 他们朝南走。 | tāmen cháo nán zǒu | They are heading south. |

.../cont

Chinese Grammar - Prepositions(locations)

Examples: continued

| | | |
|-------------|------------------------------------|--|
| 这里离机场有20公里。 | zhèlǐ lí jīchǎng yǒu èr shí gōnglǐ | The airport is 20 kilometres from here. |
| 他向她转去。 | tā xiàng tā zhuǎn qù | He turned to her. |
| 他沿外滩散步。 | tā yán wàitān sànbù | He is taking a walk along the Bund. |
| 学生都往教室走了。 | xuésheng dōu wǎng jiàoshì zǒu le | The students all headed for the classroom. |

NB: 在 can function as a preposition or as a verb meaning 'to be in place'. 在 often forms fixed expression with location words:

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------|------------|--------|---------|---------------|-------------|---------|---------------|-----------|
| 在 ... 里 | zài ... lǐ | inside | 在 ... 中 | zài ... zhōng | in, amongst | 在 ... 上 | zài ... shàng | on top of |
|---------|------------|--------|---------|---------------|-------------|---------|---------------|-----------|

Examples: zài as a preposition and a verb:

| | | |
|----------|---------------------------|--|
| 她在北京学哲学。 | tā zài běijīng xué zhéxué | She is studying philosophy in Beijing. |
| 小孩子在花园里。 | xiǎo háizi zài huāyuán lǐ | The child is in the garden. |

Chinese Grammar - Negation

The most common way of saying that something is not the case is using 不 (bù).

| | | |
|--------|------------------|---------------------|
| 我不是老师。 | wǒ bù shì lǎoshī | I am not a teacher. |
|--------|------------------|---------------------|

With the verb 有 (yǒu) 'to have' and for events that are completed use 没 (méi) instead of 不。

| | | |
|----------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 我没有兄弟姐妹。 | wǒ méi yǒu xiōngdìjiěmèi | I don't have brothers or sisters. |
| 她没去图书馆。 | tā méi qù túshūguǎn | She has not gone to the library. |

Note: the positive form of the sentence would be 她去了图书馆。(tā qù le túshūguǎn) She has gone to the library. Since 没 already implies a completed state, the aspect marker 了 (le) is not needed.

Chinese has no simple 'yes' or 'no'. Instead, the main verb is normally repeated, with either 对 (duì) to confirm or 不 (bù) to deny added in front.

| | | |
|--------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| 你是学生吗? | Nǐ shì xuésheng ma? | Are you a student? |
| 是 | shì | Yes. |
| 对, 是学生 | duì, shì xuésheng | Correct, (I) am a student. |
| 不是 | bù shì | No. |

Chinese Grammar - Negation

To say that you agree or disagree you can say:

| | | | | | |
|-----|-----------|---------|------|--------------|------------|
| 我同意 | wǒ tóngyì | I agree | 我不同意 | wǒ bù tóngyì | I disagree |
|-----|-----------|---------|------|--------------|------------|

Note on the pronunciation of 不:

The tone of 不 varies according to context. On its own or if 不 is followed by a syllable in the first, second or third tone, the pronunciation is bù. If 不 precedes a fourth tone 不 is pronounced in the second tone bú.

| | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Wǒ bù xiǎngjiā (I am not homesick) | Wǒ bú shì lǎoshī (I am not a teacher) |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|

(However 不 is normally always written as bù even when it is pronounced in the second tone).

Chinese Grammar - Common conjunctions

和 (hé): and - 和 **can only link words and phrases, not sentences.**

Example:

| | | |
|----------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 她喜欢茶和咖啡。 | tā xǐhuan chá hé kāfēi | She likes tea and coffee. |
|----------|------------------------|---------------------------|

或 (huò) : or - 或 **can only link words and phrases, not sentences**

或者 (huòzhě) : or - 或者 **can be used with words, phrases and sentences**

还是 (háishi) : or - 还是 **used in questions**

Examples:

| | | |
|----------------|---|---|
| 我想买一瓶橙汁或一瓶苹果汁。 | wǒ xiǎng mǎi yī píng chéngzhī huò yī píng píngguǒzhī. | I would like to buy a bottle of orange juice or apple juice. |
| 我想出去跳舞或者在家看电视。 | wǒ xiǎng chūqù tiàowǔ huòzhě zài jiā kàn diànshì. | I would like to go dancing or to stay at home and watch TV. |
| 你喝茶还是咖啡? | nǐ hē chá háishi kāfēi? | Do you drink tea or coffee |

Chinese Grammar - Common conjunctions

如果 (rúguǒ): if

| | | |
|----------------|---|--|
| 如果我有钱，我就买一辆新车。 | rúguǒ wǒ yǒuqián, wǒ jiù mǎi yī liàng xīn chē | If I had money, I would buy a new car. |
|----------------|---|--|

可是 (kěshi): but

| |
|--|
| 我喜欢听流行音乐，可是我朋友喜欢听古典音乐。 |
| wǒ xǐhuān tīng liúxíng yīnyuè, kěshì wǒ péngyou xǐhuān tīng gǔdiǎn yīnyuè. |
| I like listening to pop music, but my friend likes listening to classical music. |

因为 (yīnwèi): because

| | | |
|-----------------|--|---|
| 我学中文，因为我要去中国旅行。 | wǒ xué zhōngwén, yīnwèi wǒ yào qù zhōngguó lǚxíng. | I am studying Chinese because I want to go and travel in China. |
|-----------------|--|---|

所以 (suǒyǐ): therefore

| | | |
|---------------|--|--|
| 她太忙了，所以不出去跳舞。 | tā tài máng le, suǒyǐ bù chūqù tiàowǔ. | She is very busy, therefore she can't go out dancing |
|---------------|--|--|

Chinese Grammar - Common conjunctions

虽然 (suīrán): although

| | | |
|--------------------|---|--|
| 虽然他很忙, 他还是邀请我们去他家。 | suīrán tā hěn máng, tā hái shì yāoqǐng wǒmen qù tā jiā. | Although he is very busy, he has invited us to his home. |
|--------------------|---|--|

除了 ... 以外 (chúle ... yǐwài): except

| | | |
|-------------------|---|---|
| 除了北京以外, 我没去过其他地方。 | chúle běijīng yǐwài, wǒ méi qù guò qítā dìfāng. | Apart from Beijing I have not been to any other places. |
|-------------------|---|---|

就 (jiù): 就 is often used to create a link between the idea in the preceding clause and the current clause.

| | | |
|-------------------|---|---|
| 如果你想看电视, 我们就呆在家里。 | rúguǒ nǐ xiǎng kàn diànshì, wǒmen jiù dāi zài jiā lǐ. | If you want to watch TV, we can stay at home. |
|-------------------|---|---|

Chinese Grammar - Aspect

Chinese uses three particles to express the temporal aspect of a statement.

着 (zhe) indicates the action is ongoing.

了 (le) indicates the action is completed but is affecting the current state.

过 (guò) indicates that something was experienced in the past

着

| | | |
|---------------|--|---|
| 老师还病着, 我们不上课。 | lǎoshī hái bìngzhe, wǒmen bù shàng kè. | The teacher is still ill, we don't go to class. |
|---------------|--|---|

了

| | | |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| 他回家了我们就吃晚饭。 | tā huí jiā le, wǒmen jiù chī wǎnfàn. | After he came home, we had supper. After he comes home, we will have supper. |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|---|

Note: 了 marks an event as complete, but it can refer to an event in the past, the present or the future.

了 can also be used as a sentence level particle indicating a change of state.

过

| | | |
|----------------|--|---|
| 我认识颐和园, 我去过北京。 | wǒ rènshi yíhéyuán, wǒ qù guò běijīng. | I know the Summer Palace, I have been to Beijing. |
|----------------|--|---|

Chinese Grammar - Attitude

啊

啊 is used to soften the tone of an utterance or to establish an emotional link with the listener.

| | | |
|----------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 快来啊! | kuài lái a | Come quickly. |
| 这个问题很难啊! | zhè gè wèntí hěn kùnnan a | This problem is really difficult! |

吧

吧 is asking for agreement or approval of an utterance or to form a polite request.

| | | |
|------------|-------------------------|---|
| 他们已经来了吧。 | tāmen yǐjīng lái le ba | They must have arrived already, mustn't they. |
| 你们渴了吧? | nǐmen kě le ba? | You must be thirsty? |
| 不早了, 我们走吧! | bù zǎo le, wǒmen zǒu ba | It is late, let's go! |

呢

呢 is used to express an expectation or to ask for additional information.

| | | |
|------------|----------------------------|--|
| 我是学生, 你呢? | wǒ shì xuésheng, nǐ ne | I am a student, and you? |
| 昨天很热, 今天呢? | zuótiān hěn rè, jīntiān ne | It was very hot yesterday, what about today? |

Chinese Grammar - Modals

Chinese uses three particles to express the temporal aspect of a statement.

会 (huì) ability, future possibility:

| | | |
|--------|----------------------|------------------|
| 我会说中文。 | wǒ huì shuō zhōngwén | I speak Chinese. |
|--------|----------------------|------------------|

能 (néng) possibility, permission:

| | | |
|--------|----------------------|---------------|
| 你能不能来? | nǐ néng bù néng lái? | Can you come? |
|--------|----------------------|---------------|

可以 (kěyǐ) permission:

| | | |
|------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| 我可以在这里抽烟吗? | wǒ kěyǐ zài zhèlǐ chōuyān ma | Can I smoke here? |
|------------|------------------------------|-------------------|

要 (yào) to want, to have to, to become:

| | | |
|-----------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 我要去中国。 | wǒ yào qù zhōngguó | I want to go to China. |
| 你要更认真地工作。 | nǐ yào gèng rènzhēn dì gōngzuò | You must work more conscientiously. |

想 (xiǎng) wish:

| | | |
|----------|----------------------------|--|
| 我想吃宫保鸡丁。 | wǒ xiǎng chī gōngbǎojīdīng | I would like spicy diced chicken with peanuts. |
|----------|----------------------------|--|

Chinese Grammar - Modals

Chinese uses three particles to express the temporal aspect of a statement.

愿意 (yuànyì) willingness:

| | | |
|---------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| 你愿意就来吧! | nǐ yuànyì jiù lái ba | If you want you can come! |
|---------|----------------------|---------------------------|

得 (děi) must:

| | | |
|--------|-------------------|------------------------|
| 我得做功课。 | wǒ děi zuò gōngkè | I must do my homework. |
|--------|-------------------|------------------------|

Note: Here 得 is pronounced děi.

必须 (bìxū) must:

| | | |
|----------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 你必须努力工作。 | nǐ bìxū nǔlì gōngzuò | You must work hard! |
|----------|----------------------|---------------------|

应该 (yīnggāi) ought to:

| | | |
|------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 你应该尊敬你的父母。 | nǐ yīnggāi zūnjìng nǐ de fùmǔ | You ought to respect your parents. |
|------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|

Chinese Grammar - 一下

The use of 一下

一下 is used to indicate that some action is only lasting a short while. It is often used to indicate that somebody is doing something briefly or when making a request for some help or support.

| | | |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| 我不确定, 让我想一下。 | Wǒ bù quèdìng, ràng wǒ xiǎng yīxià. | I'm not sure - let me think. |
| 您需要什么? 我不知道。 我看一下。 | Nín xūyào shénme? Wǒ bù zhīdào. Wǒ kàn yīxià. | What are you looking for? I don't know - I am only having a quick look around. |
| 我作业做完了。 你看一下吧。 | Wǒ zuòyè zuò wán le. Nǐ kàn yīxià ba. | I have finished my homework. Can you have a look, please. |

Chinese Grammar - Nominal measure words

Chinese nouns, preceded either by a number, a demonstrative pronoun, or an interrogative pronoun, require a measure word before the noun. Some measure words have an English equivalent, e.g.

| | | |
|-----|-------------|--------------------|
| 一束花 | yī shù huā | a bunch of flowers |
| 一群羊 | yī qún yáng | a flock of sheep |

Most Chinese measure words have, however, no English equivalent, e.g. 三个人 (sān gè rén) three people. The most common and generic measure word is 个 (gè). It is used with most abstract terms. Some measure words indicate a quantity and have an English equivalent:

| | | |
|------|------------------|---------------------|
| 两瓶啤酒 | liǎng píng píjiǔ | two bottles of beer |
| 一副手套 | yī fù shǒutào | a pair of gloves |
| 一块蛋糕 | yī kuài dànɡāo | a slice of cake |
| 一张纸 | yī zhāng zhǐ | a piece of paper |

Chinese Grammar - Nominal measure words

Most Chinese measure words have, however, no English equivalent, e.g. 三个人 (sān gè rén) three people
 The most common and generic measure word is 个 (gè). It is used with most abstract terms.
 Some measure words indicate a quantity and have an English equivalent:

| | | | |
|------------------------------|------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 张 (flat things): | 一张桌子 | yī zhāng zhuōzi | a table |
| 本 (books): | 一本词典 | yī běn cídiǎn | a dictionary |
| 条 (winding things): | 一条裤子, 一条河 | yī tiáo kùzi, yī tiáo hé | a pair of trousers, a river |
| 篇 (paper work, documents): | 一篇文章 | yī piān wénzhāng | an essay |
| 把 (something with a handle): | 一把椅子, 一把雨伞 | yī bǎ yǐzi, yī bǎ yǔsǎn | a chair, an umbrella |

Some measure words are very specific to a particular noun 一匹马 (yī pǐ mǎ) a horse

Examples:

| | | | | | |
|------|---------------|----------------|------|-------------|--------------|
| 三个老师 | sān gè lǎoshī | three teachers | 六匹马 | liù pǐ mǎ | six horses |
| 这个老师 | zhè gè lǎoshī | this teacher | 这本书 | zhè běn shū | this book |
| 哪个老师 | nǎ gè lǎoshī | what teacher? | 哪把椅子 | nǎ bǎ yǐzi | which chair? |

Chinese Grammar - Nominal measure words

Common measure words:

| | | | | | |
|---|------|-----------------------------|---|-------|----------------------|
| 个 | gè | general | 杯 | bēi | cups, glasses |
| 件 | jiàn | clothes | 架 | jià | airplanes, machines |
| 篇 | piān | documents | 块 | kuài | cakes |
| 瓶 | píng | liquid | 只 | zhī | animals |
| 把 | bǎ | things with handles | 本 | běn | books, maps |
| 封 | fēng | letters | 间 | jiān | rooms |
| 棵 | kē | plants | 辆 | liàng | cars |
| 位 | wèi | person (more formal than 个) | 座 | zuò | buildings, mountains |

Chinese Grammar - Verbal measure words

Verbal measure words indicate how often an action is carried out.

次 (cì) is used to say how many times something happened.

遍 (biàn) is used to emphasise that an activity was carried out for a number of times completely.

趟 (tàng) is used only with verbs of movement like

去 (qù, to go), 走 (zǒu, to walk), 来 (lái, to come), 飞 (fēi, to fly), 跑 (pǎo, to run) etc.

| | | |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| 次: 我到北京来过三次。 | wǒ dào běijīng lái guò sān cì | I have been to Beijing three times. |
| 趟: 她飞了一趟伦敦。 | tā fēi le yī tàng lúndūn | She has flown to London once. |
| 遍: 他这本小说看了十遍。 | tā zhè běn xiǎoshuō kàn le shí biàn | He has read this novel (completely) ten times. |

Chinese Grammar - Complements

Complements are a very common structure in Chinese. They clarify the predicate of a sentence and follow it. Complements can express result, conclusion, potential or extent.

Extent

| | | |
|-----------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 你说汉语说得很好。 | nǐ shuō hànǔ shuō de hěn hǎo | You speak Chinese very well. |
|-----------|------------------------------|------------------------------|

The verb is repeated after the object 汉语, then 得 plus complement are added.
If there is no object you can simply add 得 and the complement.

| | | |
|-----------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 你说汉语说得很好。 | nǐ shuō hànǔ shuō de hěn hǎo | You speak Chinese very well. |
|-----------|------------------------------|------------------------------|

Complement of potential

| | | |
|----------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 你听得清楚吗? | nǐ tīng de qīngchǔ ma? | Can you hear clearly? |
| 蘑菇洗不干净吗? | mógú xǐ bù gānjìng ma? | Can't you wash the mushrooms cleanly? |
| 她走不了! | tā zǒu bù liǎo | She can't go! |

得 is used to add the complement, in negative sentences 得 is replaced by 不。

Chinese Grammar - Complements

Complement of result

Either an adjective or noun that follows the main verb to indicate the result of the action.

Typical complements of result are: 错, 好, 见, 住

| | | |
|------------|--------------------------------|--|
| 他听错了。 | tā tīng cuò le | He misheard. |
| 孩子做好他的作业。 | háizi zuò hǎo tā de zuòyè | The child completed his homework. |
| 我看见了我的朋友。 | wǒ kànjiàn le wǒde péngyou | I saw my friend. |
| 这很重要。我得记住。 | zhè hěn zhòngyào. wǒ děi jìzhù | This is important. I must remember (it). |

Complement of direction

Indicate the direction (metaphorical as well as real) of the action of the main verb.

| | | | | | |
|--------|-----------------|-------------|-------|---------------|---------------------|
| 他跑出去了。 | tā pǎo chūqù le | He ran out. | 他下楼去。 | tā xià lóu qù | He went downstairs. |
|--------|-----------------|-------------|-------|---------------|---------------------|

Complement of direction

Indicate the manner in which something is done. The verb is repeated after the object 饭, then 得 plus complement are added. If there is no object you can simply add 得 and the complement.

| | | |
|----------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| 他吃饭吃得很慢。 | tā chīfàn chī de hěn màn | He eats slowly. |
| 他说得很快。 | tā shuō de hěn kuài | He speaks very fast. |

Chinese Grammar - 的

的 is used to link adjective and nouns.

| | | |
|-------|-----------------|--------------------|
| 老师的书 | lǎoshī de shū | the teacher's book |
| 我的自行车 | wǒ de zìxíngchē | my bicycle |

The noun can be dropped if it is clear from the context:

| | | |
|---------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| 这是我的。 | zhè shì wǒ de | this is mine |
| 老师的在那儿。 | lǎoshī de zài nàr | the teacher's is over there. |

With possessive adjective the 的 can be dropped if a close relationship exists between the two.

我的爸爸 or 我爸爸

Single syllable adjective can be used as an attribute without 的。

| | | |
|------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 小孩子不上学。 | xiǎo háizi bù shàng xué | Small children don't go to school. |
| but | | |
| 那边的孩子在做什么？ | nà biān de háizi zài zuò shénme | What are the children over there doing |

Chinese Grammar - 地 (de)

地 is used to combine verbs and adverbs.

她高兴地唱着。

tā gāoxìng de chàng zhe

She is singing happily.

Single syllable adverbs can be used without 地.

您慢走。

nín màn zǒu

(You) Please walk slowly.

Chinese Grammar - 得

得 has a number of different uses.

得 (děi) is a modal verb, meaning 'to have to do something'.

| | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| 我的汉语不好, 我得努力学习。 | wǒde hànyǔ bù hǎo, wǒ děi nǚlì xuéxí | My Chinese is not very good, I must study conscientiously. |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|--|

得 (de) is used to link a complement and the verb.

| | | |
|----------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 她现在紧张得很。 | tā xiànzài jǐnzhāng de hěn | She is very tense at the moment. |
|----------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|

See Complements for more details.

得到 (dé dào) means to 'receive'.

| | | |
|---------------|---|---|
| 出事以后他得到了很多帮助。 | chūshì yǐhòu tā dé dào le hěn duō bāngzhù | He received a lot of help after his accident. |
|---------------|---|---|

Chinese Grammar - 来 (lái)

得到 (dédào) means to 'receive'.

| | | | |
|---|----------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 来 to come: | 他上星期来北京。 | tā shàng xīngqī lái běijīng | He came to Beijing last week. |
| 来 complement indicating movement towards the speaker: | 他进来了。 * | tā jìn lái le | He came in. |
| 来 indicating intention to do something: | 我来唱歌。 | wǒ lái chàng gē | Let me sing. |
| 来 ask somebody to bring something: | 来一瓶啤酒。 | lái yī píng pījiǔ | Bring me a bottle of beer. |

* 去 is used to indicate movement away from the speaker: 他进去了 (tā jìn qù le) He went in.

Chinese Grammar - 给

给 (gěi) can function as a preposition or a verb. It is also used in a number of very common expressions.

给 (gěi) as a preposition:

| | | |
|------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 请你给我打一个电话。 | qǐng nǐ gěi wǒ dǎ yī gè diànhuà | Please give me a call. (lit. Please for me make a phone call.) |
|------------|---------------------------------|--|

给 (gěi) as a verb:

| | | |
|-----------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 他给了我一个礼物。 | tā gěi le wǒ yī gè lǐwù | He gave me a present |
|-----------|-------------------------|----------------------|

When somebody hands something (e.g. money) to another person the expression 给 or 给你 often accompanies the action.

Chinese Grammar - Time/Duration

Time is usually expressed through nominal constructions. If there are several expressions of time, the larger unit precedes the smaller. The time expression appears before the predicate.

| | | |
|---------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 明天我去北京。 | míngtiān wǒ qù běijīng | I will go to Beijing tomorrow. |
| 今天我很累。 | jīntiān wǒ hěn lèi | I am very tired today. |

To ask for the time use 什么时候 in the same place as the time expression:

你什么时候去北京? (nǐ shénme shíhòu qù běijīng). When are you going to Beijing?

Duration is expressed as an attribute or complement of the predicate

| | | |
|------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| 他在北京住了一年半。 | tā zài běijīng zhù le yī nián bàn | He lived in Beijing for a year and a half. |
| 他们跳舞跳了一夜。 | tāmen tiàowǔ tiào le yī yē | They danced all night. |

(NB: The main verb of the predicate is repeated before the expression of duration.)

To ask for the duration use 多长时间 (duōshǎo shíjiān) or 多久 (duōjiǔ) in the place of the expression of duration:

| | | |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 他在北京住了多长时间? | tā zài běijīng zhù le duōshǎo shíjiān | How long did he live in Beijing for? |
| 他们跳舞跳了多久? | tāmen tiàowǔ tiào le duōjiǔ | How long did they dance for? |

Chinese Grammar - Location

Location is usually expressed through nominal constructions. Common location words are:

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------|-------|----------|--------|------|-------|--------|---------|------|--------|------|-------|------|-------|
| 上 | 下 | 前 | 后 | 左 | 右 | 里 | 外 | also | 中 | 东 | 南 | 西 | 北 |
| shàng | xià | qián | hòu | zuǒ | yòu | lǐ | wài | | zhōng | dōng | nán | xī | běi |
| above | below | in front | behind | left | right | inside | outside | | middle | east | south | west | north |

Location words can be used as:

| | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| attributes in front of a noun | | |
| 北大楼 | běi dàlóu | the large building in the North |
| after a directional preposition | | |
| 他拐向北 | tā guǎi xiàng běi | He turned North |
| following a noun | | |
| 门外 | mén wài | outside the door |
| 地上 | dì shàng | on the floor |

The location words can be combined with 边 (or 面, 头).

e.g. 上边 (shàngbian, above), 后边 (hòubian, behind), 外边 (wàibian, outside)

Chinese Grammar - Location

The location words can function as:

| | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------|---|
| the subject | | |
| 东边是一个饭店。 | dōngbian shì yī gè fàndiàn | On the left there is a hotel. |
| the object | | |
| 自行车在后边。 | zìxíngchē zài hòubian | The bicycle is at the back. |
| or an attribute | | |
| 前边的邮局很大。 | qiánbian de yóujú hěn dà | The post office in the front is very big. |

Chinese Grammar - Passive

The passive is usually implied by context. Under the influence of Western languages overt passive constructions have become more common recently. The logical subject of the passive construction is marked by 被 (bèi). In spoken Chinese 让 (ràng), 叫 (jiào) or 给 (gěi) are used as well.

| | | |
|------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 我的笔被她拿走了。 | wǒde bǐ bèi tā ná zǒu le | My pen was taken away by her. |
| 我的书让我朋友借了。 | wǒde shū ràng wǒ péngyou jiè le | My book was borrowed by my friend. |

If the logical subject is obvious from the context it can be dropped.

| | | |
|-----------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 他的自行车被偷了。 | tāde zìxíngchē bèi tōu le | His bicycle was stolen. |
|-----------|---------------------------|-------------------------|

Chinese Grammar - 把 - construction

The 把 construction is specific to Chinese. 把 is inserted before the object and the construction precedes the verb. The normal sentence order SVO then becomes S把OV.

学生把作业做完了。

xuésheng bǎ zuòyè zuò wán le

The student finished the homework.

The 把 construction can only be used with:

transitive verbs

the objective must be definite (not some abstract concept)

the verb must modify the object in some way

the verb must be followed by some other element (e.g. a complement, 了)

Chinese Grammar - 是.....的 construction

The 是.....的 construction is used to emphasise a particular part of the sentence. 是 precedes the emphasised phrase, 的 at the end of the sentence.

| | | |
|-------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 他是去年毕业的。 | Tā shì qù nián bìyè de | He graduated LAST YEAR. |
| 他们是坐飞机去上海的。 | tāmen shì zuò fēiji qù shànghǎi de | They flew to Shanghai BY PLANE. |

If the object of the sentence is to be emphasised, 的 follows the verb.

| | | |
|---------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 我学的是中文。 | wǒ xuéde shì zhōngwén | I am studying CHINESE. |
|---------|-----------------------|------------------------|

End of Basic Chinese Grammar - Index